



# MASTERING COMPOSITION

*IN DIGITAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY*

*By [FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com](http://FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com)*

# **Mastering Composition in Digital Photography: Creative Techniques for Capturing Better Photos**

By [FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com](http://FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com)

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If you find this book helpful in any way please recommend it to your friends and other photographers so they too can take advantage of the information.

Cover photo by [Seth Lemmons](#)

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## Introduction

One of the major problems we find that the subscribers to our website ([FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com](http://FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com)) face is not knowing what it takes to compose a great photo.

Often, a photographer will spend long days capturing photos only to return with a set of images that he or she is not completely satisfied with. Sure, the lighting and exposure may have turned out great, but the overall composition of the photos leaves something to be desired. In short, they lack that “wow” factor that they see in other photographers’ shots.

A great picture is often a mixture of several ingredients, such as beautiful light, subject matter, the perfect moment, timing and mood, but most importantly it’s personal vision and composition!

Composition is the foundation in which great photography is built upon. A photo may be properly lit and contain good subject matter, but if it doesn’t have good composition it will never be considered more than an amateur shot.

You see, learning the tricks professionals use to craft a great image design and discovering how they incorporate these into composition will lay the foundation for you to create amazing photographs. In fact, once you master the art of composition, you’ll know exactly what elements it takes to compose a great shot before you even touch the shutter button! As a result, it will free you up to concentrate on the other ingredients that go into making a beautiful photograph.

When you finish reading this book be sure to check out our other books [Mastering Aperture in Digital Photography](#), [Mastering Shutter Speed in Digital Photography](#) and [Mastering Exposure in Digital Photography](#) to discover other ingredients that can really make your photos shine. More information on these titles can be found at the end of this book in the section “Other Books on Photography.”



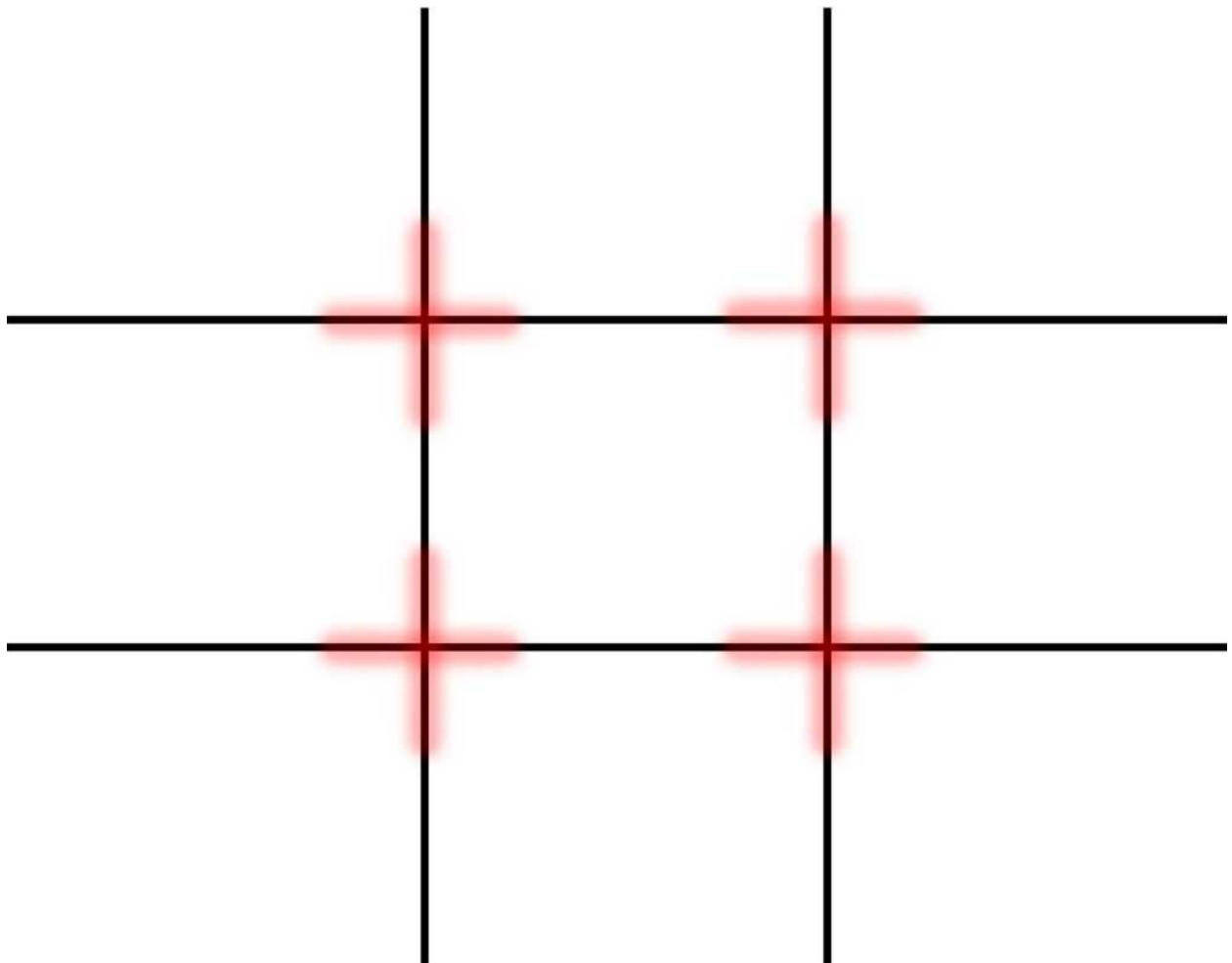
Photo by [jprime84](#)

## The Rule of Thirds

One of the most fundamental principles of photographic composition is the rule of thirds. In fact, it's such an easy composition technique to master, yet has a very powerful effect on an image. Once learned, you'll know how to properly frame your photos in a way that places your subject in one of the most appealing spots within the image.

The theory behind the rule of thirds is that if you break an image up into thirds, so you have nine equal parts (imagine a grid), and place your subject on one of the intersecting lines, you'll have a photograph that is much more attractive to the viewer.

Below, is an example of the intersecting parts that make up the rule of thirds. Imagine this grid as you look through the viewfinder of your camera.



### **The Rule of Thirds Adds Interest to Photographs**

What many new photographers don't know is that placing a subject in the middle of a photo tends to make the photo feel boring to the viewer. A photo that's framed like this is predictable and lacks visual tension.

However, by simply sliding your subject over to one of the intersecting lines of the rule of thirds grid, your photo immediately becomes more appealing because it's unpredictable. Aligning your subject in this manner enhances the visual tension in the photo, making it more interesting to the viewer.

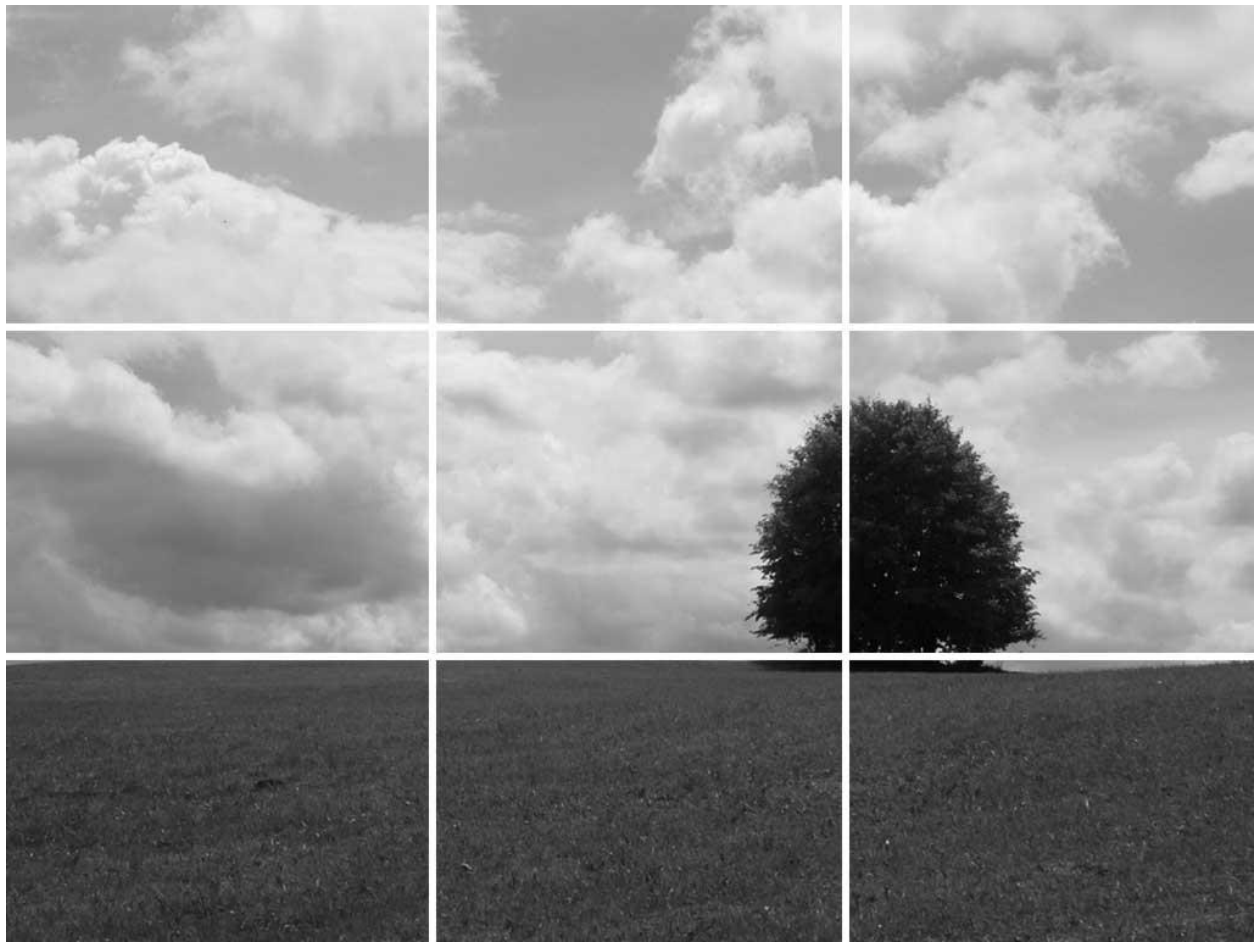


Photo by [Rosemary](#)

Visual tension tends to make for better photographic compositions. This is why the rule of thirds is so powerful. It's amazing how making such a simple adjustment within the frame can take a potentially boring photo and make it more dynamic to look at.

The next time you go to take a photograph, imagine the intersecting lines of the rule of thirds grid on top of your viewfinder. Then, place your subject on one of the four intersecting points.

## Placement for Vertically Tall Subjects

If you have a vertically tall subject, line it up so that it touches either both of the left or right points.

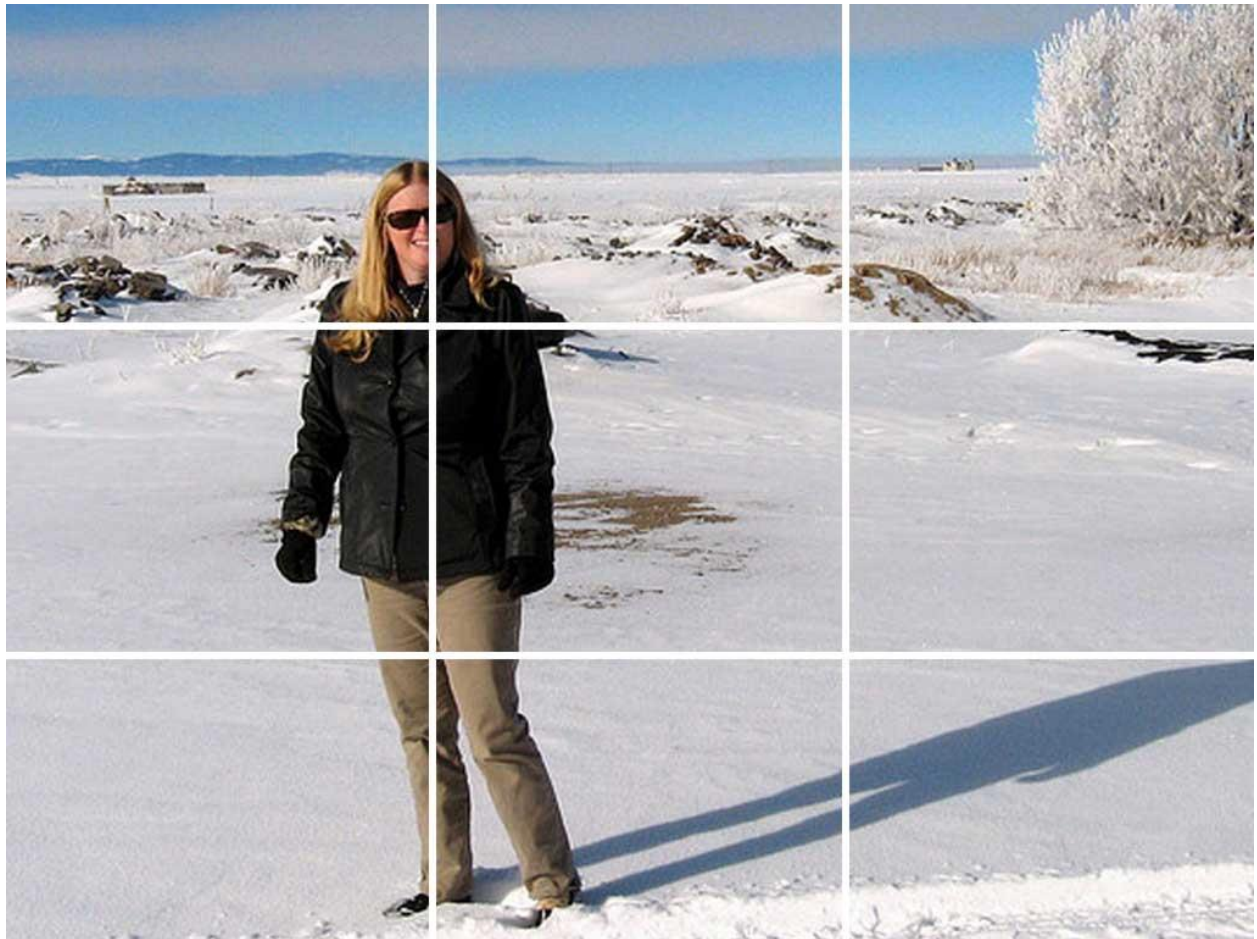


Photo by [Michael Miller](#)

## Placement for Horizontally Long Subjects

If you have a horizontally long subject, line it up so that it touches either the two top or bottom points.

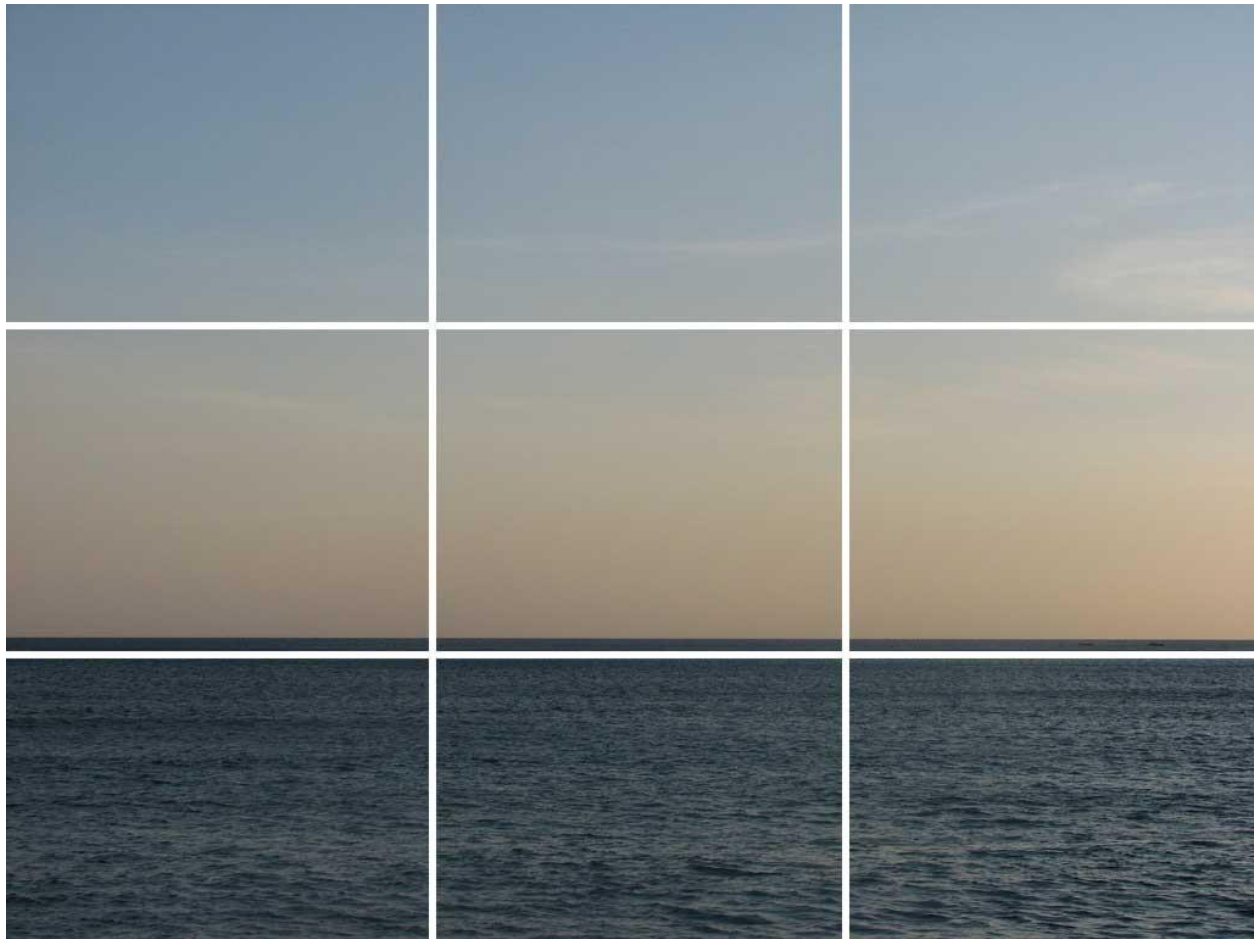


Photo by [DM Kreuz](#)

## Placement for a Dominant Vertical and Horizontal Subject

If you have a dominant vertical and horizontal subject within the frame, choose either the left or right two points and the top two or bottom points to align each with.

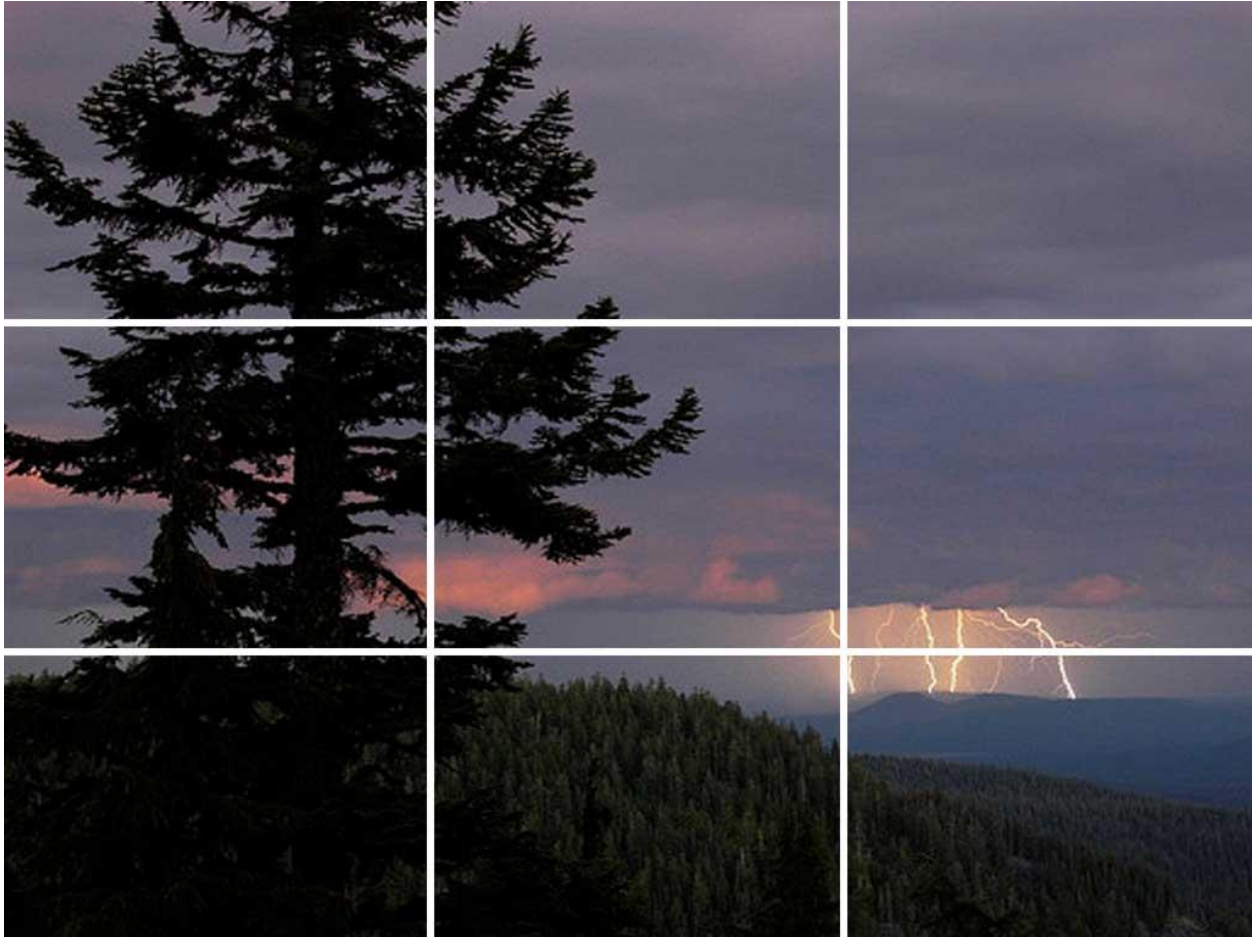


Photo by [Jeremy Howard](#)



Photo by [Roger Alcantara](#)

## How to Use Symmetry in Photography

In the last chapter, you learned about the rule of thirds and how positioning a subject off-center in a photo results in a better composition. While this is true, and you should follow that advice more often than not, it's also important that you understand how symmetry can also be used to capture a great photograph. Yes, positioning a subject in the center of the frame can result in a boring photo, but there is a trick that can take a boring symmetrical photo and turn it into something captivating to look at. You'll learn this this trick in the pages that follow.

By definition, symmetry in an image is when it can be split down the middle and the left and right sides of the photograph are mirror images of each other. In geometrical terms, imagine taking a photo of a triangle or a square. If you cut that image in half, both sides of the photo would mirror each other. That's symmetry.

Don't get hung up on the idea that to have symmetry in an image it has to be an exact mirror image on both sides. Rarely is anything in our natural world perfectly symmetrical. As long as the image is close enough to looking the same on both sides we consider it a symmetrical photo.

### **How Do You Achieve Symmetrical Photos?**

To achieve a symmetrical photo all you have to do is fill your frame with something that is almost, if not perfectly identical on both sides of the frame. Look for repetitious items within your scene and try to shoot a photo with them placed evenly apart.

Take the photo below for example. This is a perfect example of photographic symmetry because both sides of the image contain a row of windmills and they are placed similarly on each side the frame. If the photographer had panned the camera a little more to the left or right, this would have broken the symmetry because the windmills would have not been spaced evenly apart.



Photo by [Nathan Siemers](#)

The photo below is another good example of symmetry. By design, the architecture of the Parliament building is symmetrical. The photographer exemplified this trait by framing the photo so that the tower of the building is in the center of the image and the rest of the building mirrors each other on both sides.



Photo by [Jay Thompson](#)

### **Symmetrical Photos Can Pose a Problem**

One of the biggest problems with symmetrical photos is that they can often lead to a boring image. When both sides of an image are identical it doesn't take very long to look through the photograph. Everything looks mostly the same and it's easy for a viewer to digest.

Below, is a classic example of a symmetrical image that doesn't have a lot of interest (no offense to the photographer).



Photo by [Martin Heigan](#)

The photo is nearly identical on both sides of the frame and not much is going on within it. All we see is a road and a horizon. This photo is very easy to digest and not too many people would spend more than a second or two looking at this photo. While it's a good composition, it lacks any visual tension, which would keep a viewer interested in the shot.

### **Your Goal: Prevent Boring Symmetrical Photos**

Your goal as a photographer is to prevent boring symmetrical photos! Nothing is worse than a photo that lacks visual interest. Even though a photo is symmetrical it can still be visually appealing.

Here's how you do it.

You can make an eye-catching symmetrical photo by following two rules:

- 1) Capture an image where symmetry is not expected
- 2) Break up the symmetry in some way to introduce visual tension

Below are a few examples of capturing an image where symmetry is not expected. Yes, these photos are symmetrical, but notice how they are anything but boring!



Photo by [svenwerk](#)

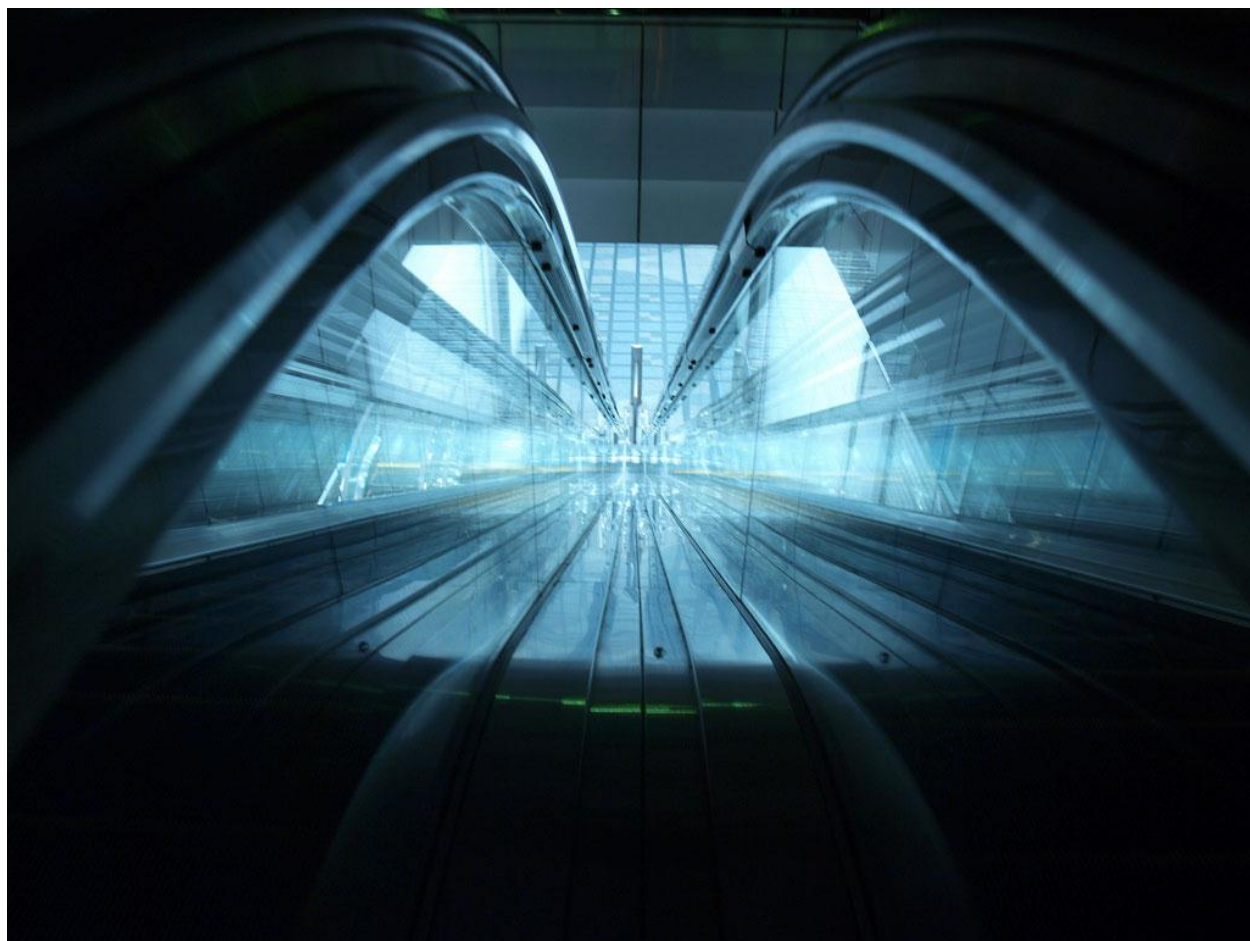


Photo by [Shinichi Higashi](#)



Photo by [Michael Dunn](#)

As we mentioned previously, another trick to creating better symmetrical photos is to break up the symmetry in a way that adds visual tension. This makes for a more dynamic symmetrical photo.

Take the photo below for example. This symmetrical image is interesting to look at because it contains visual tension - the people walking in the bottom of the frame. This small element adds visual interest and tension to this photo because it breaks up the symmetry. Without it, the photo would probably be pretty boring to look at.



Photo by [Rosmary](#)

Below, is another great example of the use of visual tension to break up symmetry within a photo. This simple inclusion of the clothes drying line and chair are what make this photo extraordinary. These elements pull your attention away from the symmetry in the photo just long enough to make it interesting to look at. Without these two things this photo would be rather boring.



Photo by [cjuneau](#)

You can now see how adding even just a small element into a scene can make for a more interesting symmetrical photo. The next time you try to capture a symmetrical photo be sure to keep in mind the tips revealed to you in this chapter. You'll be amazed at how much more intriguing your photos will be!



Photo by [Photography Corner](#)

## Understanding Balance

Balance is a compositional technique in photography that juxtaposes images within a frame so that the objects are of equal visual weight. When different parts of a photo command your attention equally, perfect balance is achieved. In photography, there are two main techniques of balance you should be aware of: formal and informal. We'll discuss the difference between each and how they can affect your photo next.

Knowing how to effectively balance objects within a photo is a skill that all serious photographers must learn. The problem with improperly balanced photographs is that they are less appealing to look at and can instantly turn off a viewer.

Balancing elements in photography becomes important when you frame your shots. If you think back to the chapter on the rule of thirds, you'll remember that we explained how placing the main subject of your photo off center can create a more dynamic photo. That's because asymmetry makes a photo more appealing to a viewer because it causes visual tension.

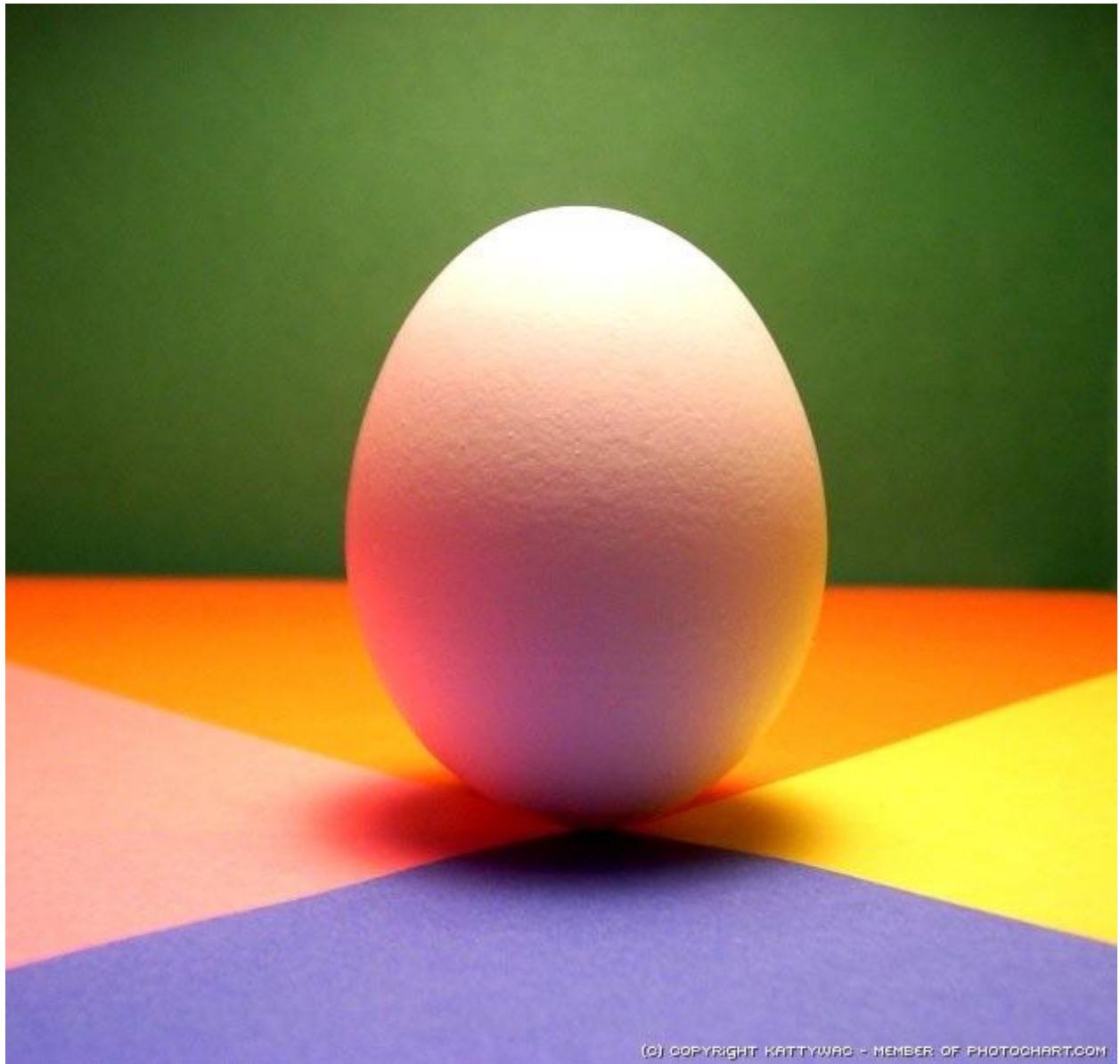
The only problem with the rule of thirds is that it can also leave a wide open empty space in a photo which may make the scene feel empty. In some instances this may work very well for your image, but if it doesn't you should try to balance the visual weight of your subject by including other objects to fill the empty space.

The two main techniques of using balance in photography are classified as formal and informal balance.

## **Formal Balance**

Formal balance can be defined as symmetrical balance. In the previous chapter, we taught you how to achieve symmetrical balance in photography. All you have to do is frame the shot so that one or more identical or similar subjects are repeated symmetrical on each sides of a given point.

The photo below is a great example of formal balance. Notice how the egg is framed in the middle of the photo with an even amount of space around all sides. The colored triangle shapes on the table top also lends itself to using this type of balance. If this photo was framed differently (using the rule of thirds), with the egg positioned on one of the left or right side of the frame, it would most likely feel unbalanced because one half of the image would be completely empty.



(c) COPYRIGHT KATTYWAC - MEMBER OF PHOTOCHART.COM

Photo by [PhotoChart](#)

Portraits can benefit greatly by using formal balance. Framing a subject in the middle of the frame for a portrait can help to reduce any visual distractions a background may contain. It's always a safe bet to frame a portrait in this way. After capturing a standard shot such as this, you can then move on to other types of positioning for the model that are more visually interesting, but still being properly balanced. This can be achieved by using informal balance.



Photo by [Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas](#)

## **Informal Balance**

Informal balance is a less obvious form of balance in photography and requires more attention. It's a concept that can be difficult to be specific about because it can be achieved in a variety of ways. Simply put, informal balance occurs when dissimilar elements balance each other out on each side of the frame. The size of each element can be irrelevant, but more often than not it's better to have a larger element juxtaposed with a smaller element or elements to make a good composition.

A well composed photo using informal balance is usually more appealing to look at compared to a formally balanced photo.

Perhaps the best way to learn about informal balance is by looking at several photo examples that effectively showcase it.



Photo by [Chang Liu](#)

Notice how the photo above feels properly balanced while containing two subjects. The man's position in the bottom left of the frame is counterbalanced perfectly by the sea creature (which is smaller in size) in the top right. If you try to imagine this photo with either one of these subjects removed, it would feel unbalanced. For example, if the sea creature was missing from the image it might feel too heavily weighted visually at the bottom of the frame with just the man looking at an empty space above. If this was the case, a center aligned formal balance might feel better to the eyes.

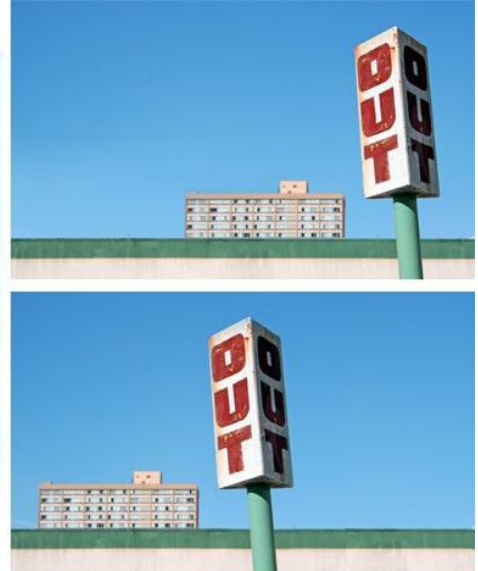


Photo by [Shannon Kokoska](#)

Above, is another great example of how two objects of varying size can be used to counterbalance each other within the frame. The OUT sign is tall and vertical, while the building is long and horizontal. Juxtaposing of size and direction perfectly complements each other. The positioning of both elements within the frame also provides proper balance for this photo. Notice, how in the alternate examples to the right, the photos feel unbalanced. If the building was centered in the frame, closer to the sign, a large empty space would remain on the left side of the frame, making it feel unbalanced. The same unbalanced feeling would occur if the sign was positioned in the middle of the frame, closer to the building, creating an empty space on the right of the frame.



Photo by [Photography Corner](#)

Above is a final example of a photo using informal balance. The photographer positioned himself to place the juniper in the foreground and to the left side of the image, and the rock formation in the background and to the right side of the image. This framing effectively lends foreground interest and balance to the composition. If the juniper was left out of this photo, it might feel unbalanced to the viewer.

### **The Rule of Thirds Works Well with Informal Balance**

If you didn't notice already, each of the previous examples followed the rule of thirds. It's important to keep this in mind when trying to create the best looking photos that utilize the informal balance technique.

### **Other Ways to Use Informal Balance**

In the previous examples, we showed you how objects of different size can be used to counterbalance each other within a frame. While this is the most obvious way to use informal balance in photography, there are other ways.

Other methods you can use include:

### **Light against dark**

A small area of white in a photo can be balanced by a larger area of black, and vice versus. Each one does not have to have the same intensity.

### **Colors**

A small area of vibrant color can be balanced by a larger area of neutral color. Vibrant colors provide more intensity and therefore large neutral areas can be used to compensate for it.

### **Texture**

Small areas with interesting textures in a photo can be balanced by larger areas of smooth, un-textured elements.



Photo by [aquinoktium](#)

## Using Lines in Photography

At first glance, you may be unaware that many photographs contain lines. Sometimes these lines are very apparent, such as a set of power lines or the long stretch of a fence. However, more often than not these lines are subtle and created by the elements within a scene. For example, a horizontal line created by an ocean horizon, vertical lines created by trees in a forest, diagonal lines formed by the limbs of a person and curved lines painted by a winding road. Regardless if the lines are immediately apparent or not within a photo, each type of line (and its direction) evokes a certain feeling in a viewer. Horizontal lines portray one thing, while vertical, diagonal and curved lines characterize something completely different. In the following pages, we'll teach what each type of line means and how you can use them to your advantage in your photography.

# Using Horizontal Lines

## Horizontal Lines Convey Stability and Peace

One of the major advantages of composing a photo with a subject that consists of dominant horizontal lines is that it can create a sense of stability and peace. Just think about the many photos you've seen of a landscape, horizon, ocean, etc. where the main subject creates a dominant horizontal line. You probably felt the same way that most others feel when they look at these photos, a sense of peace and stability.

When composing a photograph, it doesn't matter how many dominant horizontal lines are within the frame. It could be one, two, three or more. The effect on the viewer is still the same: calm, gentle and restful.

In contrast, vertical lines convey power, strength and growth (more on this will be discussed in the next chapter). Including vertical lines within a photo can disrupt the peacefulness that horizontal lines convey.

Knowing the effect horizontal lines have in your photos will help you to shoot better photographs because you'll know how to use them to your advantage.

For example, take a look at the two photos below. Both contain an element that creates a dominant horizontal line. The first photo has a horizontal line formed by the receding ocean, while the second photo has a horizontal line made up from the silhouette of the landscape the trees are growing on.

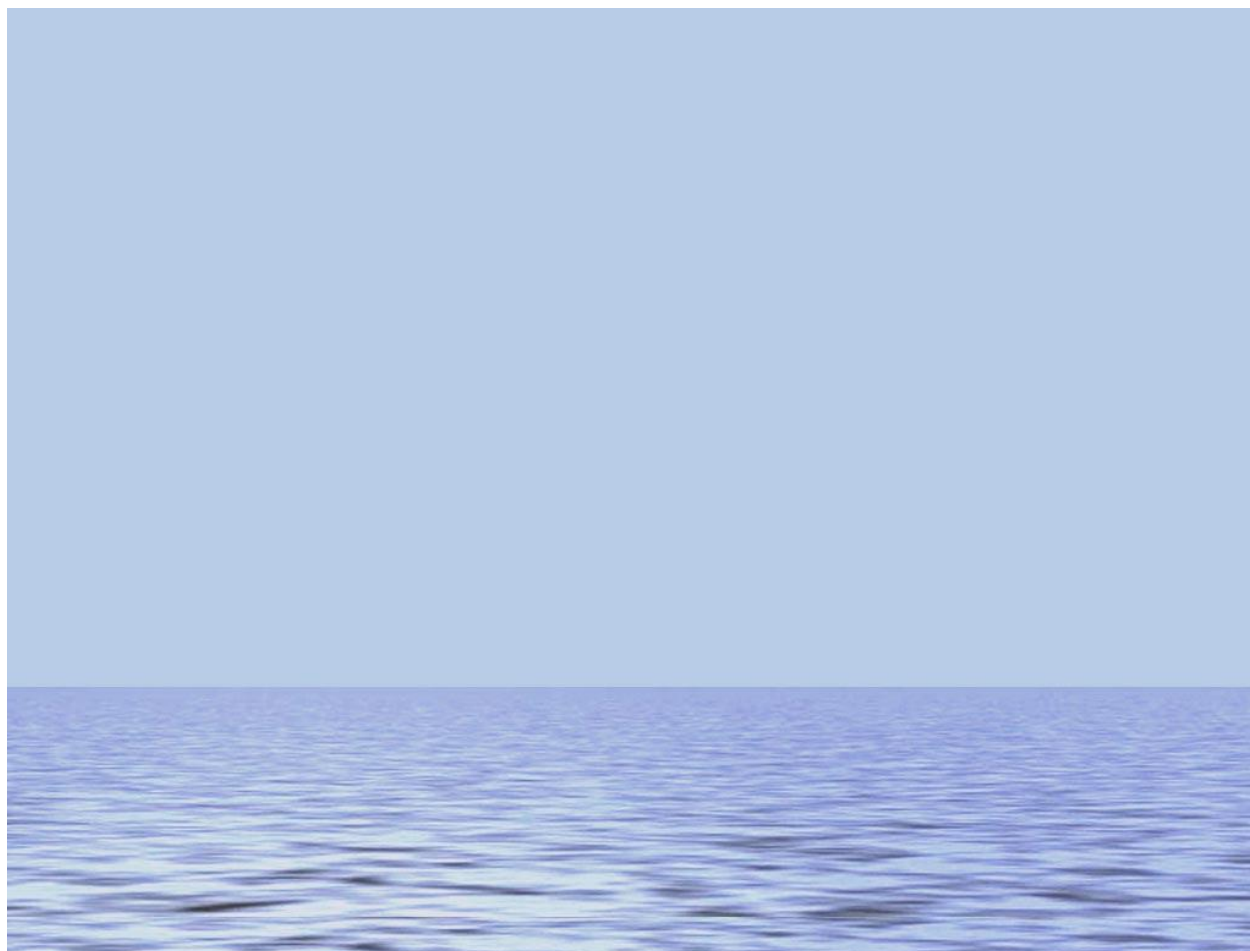


Photo by [Temari 09](#)



Photo by [Simon Dean](#)

Both of these photos above contain horizontal lines, but which one feels more calm and stable to you?

Most likely, you chose the first photo of the ocean as being more calm and stable. That's because the dominant horizontal line is not interrupted by contrasting vertical or diagonal lines. The vertical lines created by the trees in the second photograph disrupt the calming effect that the horizontal line created by the landscape. The photo feels more dynamic because of the inclusion of those vertical lines.

So how can you use this new found knowledge to your advantage? The next time you want to ensure that your photo portrays a sense of calmness, you should position your camera so that it only contains horizontal lines and eliminates any objects that create contrasting lines, such as vertical or diagonal. This way you can ensure that your photo elicits a calming feeling in the viewer and not create tension.

**Photographer Beware**

Since horizontal lines portray a sense of stability and peacefulness you need to be aware of the fact that they can also make a photo feel static and boring. A good trick you can use to keep the photo interesting is by including an element that acts as a point of interest.

For example, take a look at the photo below. It's dominated by several horizontal lines, but is anything but boring! The inclusion of the birds on the wire is what makes this image interesting. While this photo provokes a calming feeling in us, it also keeps us interested by having a subject to connect with.



Photo by [aquinoktium](#)

# Using Vertical Lines

## **Vertical Lines Convey Power, Strength and Growth**

Vertical lines have a unique ability of portraying a sense of power, strength and growth within a photograph. They also make a photo feel more dynamic. The reason behind this is because most of us associate vertically dominant objects, like buildings and trees to be more powerful than us; especially if the object is taller than us.

Studies have shown that we associate taller people to be more powerful and influential than shorter individuals, which is why the same translates into photographs. Growth is also associated with vertical lines because most living objects, like trees grow vertically upward.

Additionally, vertical lines convey a sense of strength because often you can't fill the entire frame of a photo with a vertically dominant object without having to point upward at it. Imagine trying to photograph a skyscraper from the street below. Because of this factor you often have to move far away from a vertically tall object to capture it completely in the frame.

Take a look at the photo of the buildings below. Notice how it conveys power and strength in your mind? Can you count how many vertical lines actually make up the buildings within this photo?



Photo by [seier+seier](#)

Below, is another example of how dominant vertical lines add strength, in addition to giving off a sense of growth in an image.



Photo by [Deb Collins](#)

In contrast, as you learned previously in this chapter, horizontal lines convey stability and peace.

Knowing the effect vertical lines have on your photos can also help you to capture better photographs. For example, take a look at the beach photo below. Normally, an ocean and beach front photo would make you feel calm and peaceful because it has horizontal lines formed by the horizon and sand dune. However, this photo doesn't feel that way to you, does it?

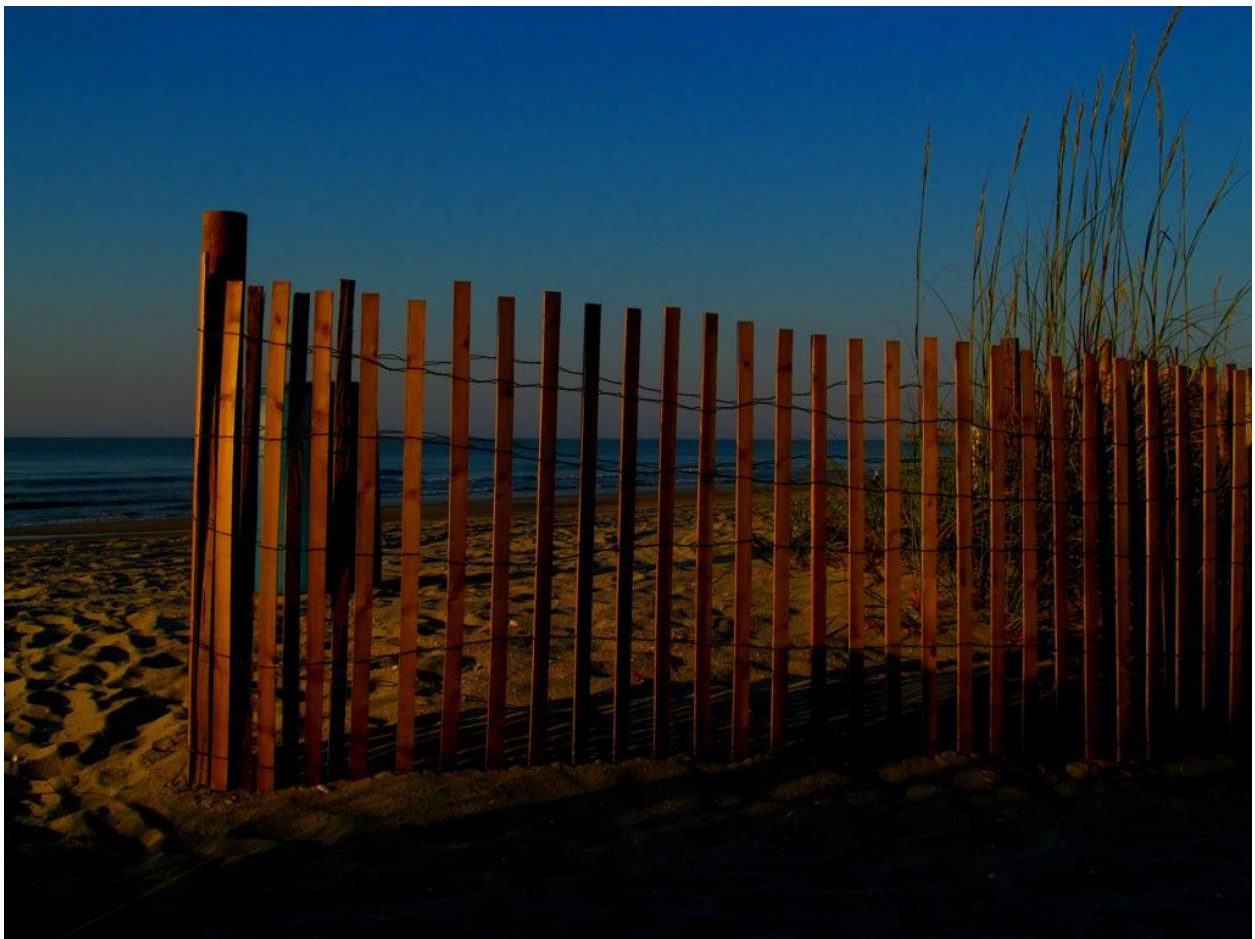


Photo by [David Cooper](#) - fence

The photo above is not very calming because the photographer chose to include the vertical lines of the fence. These vertical lines give this image energy and make it very

dynamic. You can't help but feel agitated as you stare at this photograph. The dominant vertical lines have given power and strength to this image.

# Using Diagonal Lines

## **Diagonal Lines Lead the Eye and Make Photos More Dynamic**

Diagonal lines are a great way for a photographer to lead the viewer's eye within a photograph. They also make a photo feel more dynamic as opposed to horizontal/vertical lines which tend to make a photo feel static or stable.

In our culture, we are taught to read left to right and we scan photographs in the same manner. Our eyes start on the left side of an image and scan to the right. Knowing this will help you compose photos that lead the viewer's eye naturally within the frame and help pull them into the scene.

Take a look at the photo of the train station track below for example. Your eyes are immediately drawn to the left of the frame and the end of the track. The diagonal lines push your eyes that way. It's hard to look anywhere in the frame without your eyes moving back to the left, guided by these diagonal lines.

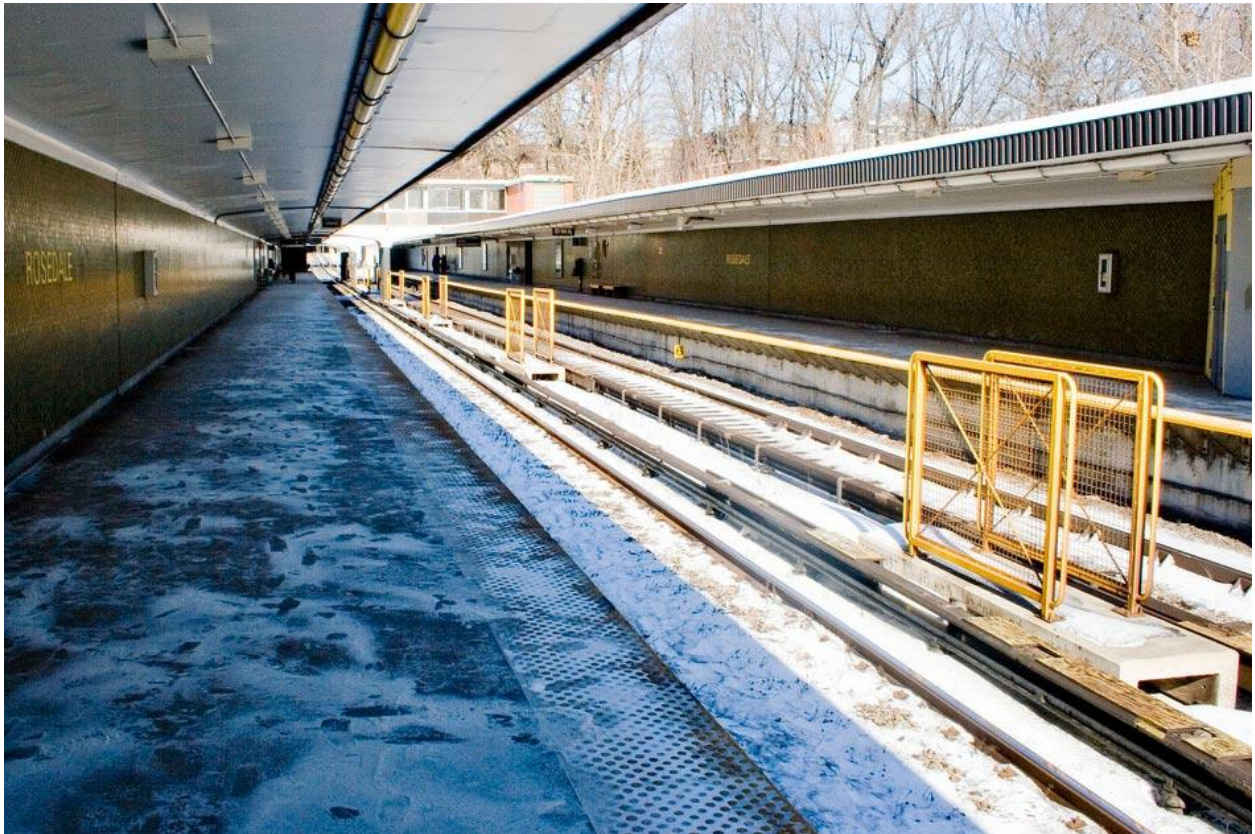


Photo by [Pat & Keri](#) - tracks

Diagonal lines, by nature, have the ability to make your photos more dynamic. This can be very useful in all types of photography and can be achieved in several ways.

Diagonal lines in photography do not always have to be distinct lines as with the train tracks in the photo above. Diagonal lines can also be implicit and still give the same effect.

Take the photo of the photographer below for example. Doesn't this photo feel very dynamic to you? A lot of energy is coming from this capture.



Photo by [Andrea](#) - photographer

At first glance, you may have only seen one diagonal line created by the background horizon that starts in the top left of the frame and extends to the bottom right. While not immediately obvious and after closer inspection you'll see that the legs and arms of the photographer also form diagonal lines. These lines subconsciously intersect the background line formed by the horizon and make this photo more dynamic.

**The More Diagonal Lines, The More Dynamic a Photo Becomes**

The previous photo brings up another unique feature of diagonal lines. The more competing diagonal lines you have within the frame, the more dynamic the photograph feels to the viewer. If you want to create a very dynamic photo, just try and incorporate as many diagonal lines as you can within the frame.

### **How You Can Enhance or Create Diagonal Lines Where They Don't Exist**

Another trick you can use to instantly create a diagonal line in a photo where none exists, is to simply tilt your camera about 30-45 degrees to one side. This will render a horizontal or vertical line as a diagonal within the frame.

In portrait photography, you can make a photo feel more dynamic by forming diagonal lines with the subject's torso, limbs and face. Take the photo below for example. It feels dynamic because the girl has positioned her body parts so that they form diagonal lines within the frame. A slight tilt of the camera enhances the dynamic feeling by making the girl's arms form a diagonal line (as opposed to vertical in which they were positioned) and causing the lines within the steps to form diagonal lines moving in the opposite direction as well.



Photo by [Luca Fazzolari](#)

# Using Curved Lines

## Curved Lines Add Beauty and Grace to a Photo

Curved lines have a unique ability to add beauty and grace to a photo. The smooth contour of curved lines helps soften the subject within a photograph as opposed to straight lines, such as horizontal, vertical, and diagonal, which tend to make a photo feel more rigid and dynamic.

Curved lines in photography allow our eyes to explore an image in a smooth, free-flowing manner. Curved lines are more romantic or dramatic than straight lines. This occurs because the viewer has something to follow with their eyes. Curved lines suggest more of a journey, whereas straight lines lead the viewer to the destination very quickly. It takes longer to follow a curved line than it does a straight line within a photograph which helps soften a photo and add beauty and grace to it.

The next time you want to make a photo feel more beautiful, try incorporating curved lines within it. Both hard formed curved lines and implicit curved lines have the same effect.

Take the photo below for example. You'll probably agree that the photo of the model feels sensual. This response comes from the implicit curved line created by the shape of her body. If the woman had not contoured her body this this manner the photo would not have felt as sensual, but more rigid.



### **Curved Lines Lead the Eye in a Photo**

A popular technique with photographers is to use curved lines to pull the viewer into a photograph. The most common type of curve used is the S Curve.

S Curves have more of an impact than just plain curved lines. By nature, S Curves are symmetrical and balanced on each side which gives them strength. Other types of curves are often asymmetrical and the affect on the viewer may be unpredictable. S Curves on the other hand are predictable and usually elicit the same response from viewers: charm and grace. That is why you see this type of curve used most often in photography.

Take the photo below for example. Notice how the sand dune contains an S Curve created by the lighting and shadow. This S Curve gives your eyes a longer journey to follow which helps to soften the photo and add beauty and grace to it.

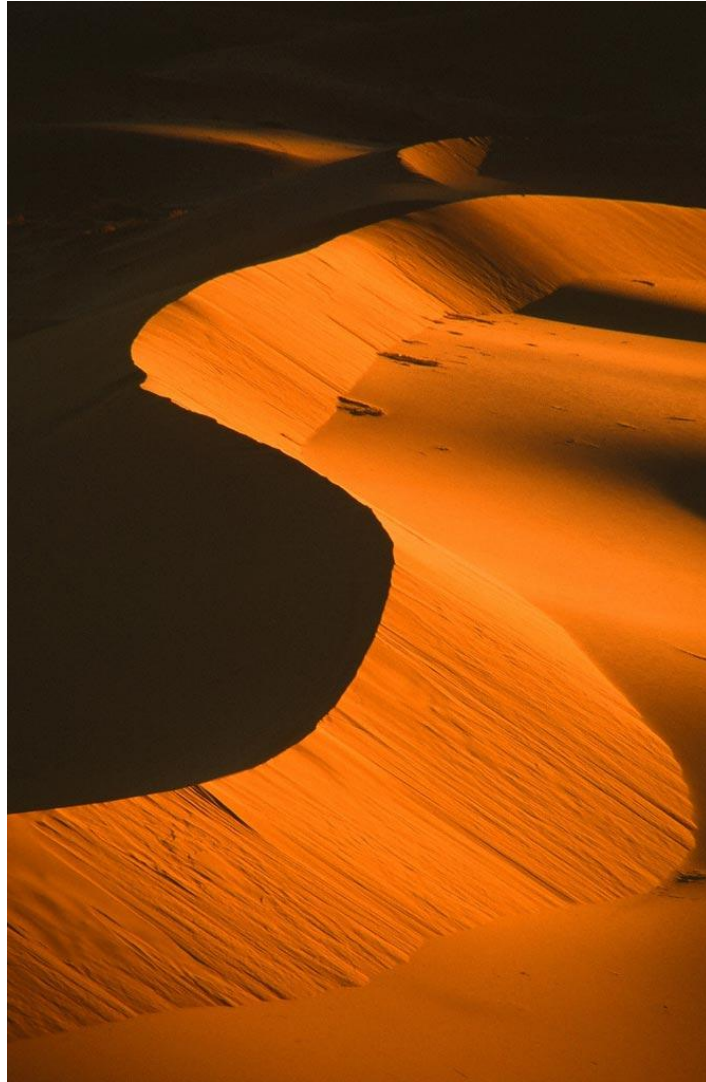


Photo by [Desmond Gribben](#) – s



## Adding Interest with Camera Angles

Here's a photographer's secret you may not have known – camera angles in photography have a major impact on how a photo makes a viewer feel and the message it conveys. You'll be amazed at how a simple adjustment in your angle to a subject can transform your photo entirely! In this chapter, we'll teach you how this works and help you learn how to choose the best camera angle for your photograph.

As a photographer, camera angles are your best friend. By learning how to use effectively use angles in photography you'll undoubtedly surpass the masses of ordinary photographers! You'll create photos that are more eye-catching, appealing and create emotion within the viewer.

There are just a few things you need to keep in mind when choosing the best camera angle for your photographs.

## **Stop Shooting 5'7" Photos**

One of the biggest mistakes new photographers make is always shooting with what's called the 5'7" camera angle. What this means is to take a photo while standing fully erect and capturing the image from your normal point of view as you see it. It's called the 5'7" angle because that's the average height of a person.

While 5'7" photos do have their place, such as in portrait photography where you want to be at eye level with the subject, most other times they tend to create rather boring looking photographs. However, there is a way around this. You just have to learn how to get creative!

## **Get Creative with Your Camera Angles**

One of the best ways to make your photos stand out from other photographers is to abandon the 5'7" camera angle and instead change your viewpoint while using your focal lengths creatively.

A trick advanced photographers use to capture better photos is to find an angle that no one else sees or has thought about within a scene. This might include climbing up a ladder, lying down on the ground, standing really far away or getting very close up.

Combining this with a creative focal length to exaggerate or compress the depth within the image is what really sets a great photographer's photos apart from everyone else.

Take the photo of the golfer below for example. It's a nicely composed image, but it falls into trap of being taken from a normal height camera angle with a medium focal length. You can probably agree that it's not too dramatic.



Photo by [Constantine Augustin](#) – golfer flat

Now, compare the previous shot to the photo of this golfer below. This one is more engaging, right?



The reason that the second photo is more intriguing to look is because the photographer got creative with the camera angle and focal length. Naturally, as viewers we are more amazed by photos that give us a unique perspective on things. A viewpoint that's extremely different from our daily normal height viewing angle can work wonders for almost any subject.

The photographer achieved this incredible angle by doing a few simple things: crouching down to ground level, getting in close to the subject and using a wide angle focal length. This simple viewpoint change gave us a perspective that we are not accustomed to and as a result, created an amazing image!

Here's another classic example of where a photographer could have used a better camera angle for more dramatic effect. The photo of the child below is by all means a great capture. It's in perfect focus, uses a shallow depth of field and is at eye level with the child. However, it's a photograph we've all seen countless times before.



Photo by [Dustin](#) – child portrait

Compare that photo to the one below. Both, the depth of field and focal length are similar in each. The only difference is the camera angle. Wouldn't you agree that this image below is more dramatic and interesting?



Photo by [Anthony Kelly](#) – child above

Hopefully, you can now see that by simply choosing a unique camera angle you can transform your photographs into something that's even more dramatic and interesting!

Once you try these tips, all sorts of ideas should start to come to mind. Just remember to try and take photos in positions that other photographers don't think about. Get high, get low, back up and zoom in, get close and zoom out, etc. The angle that you choose, can tell a completely different story than the others. Be creative!



Photo by [Ryan Polei](#)

## Out of Focus Foreground Framing

Out of focus foreground framing is a composition technique that's becoming a signature style for many photographers. Why? Because, when most people see a photo that's composed using this technique they're almost always amazed!

The reason behind this is the fact that out of focus foreground framing creates a unique point of view that we're not accustomed to seeing. It makes you feel like you are spying on the subject and they don't know you are there! Framing photographs like this can't help but affect you emotionally. So, turn the page and start learning this technique.

Out of focus foreground framing simply means that you position yourself so that there are objects in the foreground that you can throw out of focus to frame the subject. It's a really simple way to add depth and creativity to a photograph, as well as add emphasis to the main subject.

The key to creating the best out of focus foreground framed photos is to use a small f-stop number (also known as a larger aperture.) Depending on how close the foreground objects are to the main subject and which focal length on the lens you use will determine which aperture setting you should use.

A good rule of thumb to remember is that if the objects you are using to frame the subject are close to it, you'll need to use a smaller f-stop number to render them out of focus. If the objects are farther away from the subject you can use a higher f-stop number to create a similar effect.

The reasoning behind this is the fact that the smaller the f-stop number (larger the aperture), the less depth of field occurs within a photo. Most out of focus foreground frame photos using a moderate focal length can be achieved using an aperture setting of f/1 to f/5.6. But, you'll need to experiment, since all lighting conditions and distance between objects and subject are different. We suggest that you start with this aperture range, and if the out of focus effect is too much, use a larger f-stop number. If the effect is not enough, use a smaller f-stop number.

While we could go on for many pages explaining the impact that the aperture setting has on your photos, that topic is outside the scope of this book. However, it's something that you should understand and master if you are serious about being a great photographer. We recommend that you check out the companion book to this series, [Mastering Aperture in Digital Photography](#), available in the Amazon.com store. It will give a good understanding of the many ways aperture affects a photograph and will teach you how to always choose the perfect f-stop number for your image. You'll also learn the variety of depth of field effects you can create by using the aperture setting alone. Additional information on this companion book can be found at the end of this book in the section, "Other Books on Photography."

Below, are some great examples of using this technique.



Photo by [Ryan Polei](#)

If there are two people sitting or standing close to each other, try shooting through them to reveal the background. Use an f-stop number that will render the people close to you out of focus.



Photo by [Ryan Polei](#)

Use the elements of nature to your advantage when shoot outdoors, especially grass. Try shooting through it or positioning it in the lower half of the frame.



Photo by [Ryan Polei](#)

Trees and other inanimate objects are also a good choice to use when framing your subject with an out of focus object. Look for anything that you can use to fill in one half of the frame. Be creative! Try doors, walls, other people, flowers, etc. It doesn't matter what it is since it won't be legible when it is out of focus!



Photo by [Jana Rosenkranz](#)

Another technique along the same vein is to set the camera on to the ground when capturing a subject far away. The out of focus ground in the foreground will add that extra depth to your photograph!

Hopefully these images will inspire you to start using out of focus foreground framing on your own. The sky is the limit with this technique, and remember just about any object in the foreground can be used to create this effect, regardless what it is!



Photo by [Universal Pops](#)

## Manipulating Depth and Perspective

As you know, we live in a three-dimensional world, yet photographs are only two-dimensional objects. A challenge every photographer faces is trying to render a three-dimensional scene into a two-dimensional photo.

It's easy for us to see a multitude of depth and perspective everywhere we look by using our eyes because we see in three-dimensions. Instinctively, we can tell how far apart different objects are to each other. However, in a photograph this is vastly different because it's a two-dimensional surface.

In this chapter, we're going to teach you how to manipulate depth and perspective within a photo. As a photographer, you can either enhance the sense of depth or diminish it, depending on the type of composition you are trying to create.

There are a variety of choices you must make when setting up your composition that will affect how close or far apart objects appear to each other within a photo. These choices will either strengthen or weaken the perceived depth within an image, which can mean the difference between a shot that's award-winning and one that's not very interesting at all.

As you can see, depth and perspective is very important in photography. As a photographer, it's up to you to make the creative decision on whether to enhance or diminish it within a composition. For each set up and scene, usually only one of these choices will end up producing the best results for a given photograph. And, it's up to you to know how to achieve it.

In the following pages, you'll learn three simple tricks on how to enhance the sense of depth and perspective with your photos or how to purposefully make them look flat. As a result, you'll end up taking better composed shots because you'll know how to compose a scene using each method and always come away with the one that makes the best photograph.

### **Converging Lines Enhance Depth**

A strong sense of depth in a photo can be created by using converging lines.

Converging lines are parallel lines that move away from the foreground and converge into the background. An example you've probably seen many times before is the lines on a road or railroad track that merge together as they approach a horizon. Although the edges of road and railroad track are really equal distance apart from each other, they visually converge as they move further away from us.

This concept of converging lines can be used to your advantage to maximize or minimize the perceived depth within a photo. Take the photo below for example. Does it seem to have a lot of depth in it or does it look flat? Do you see any converging lines?



Photo by [David Lenker](#)

Now, look at this photo below. Does this one showcase a strong sense of depth? Do you see converging lines?

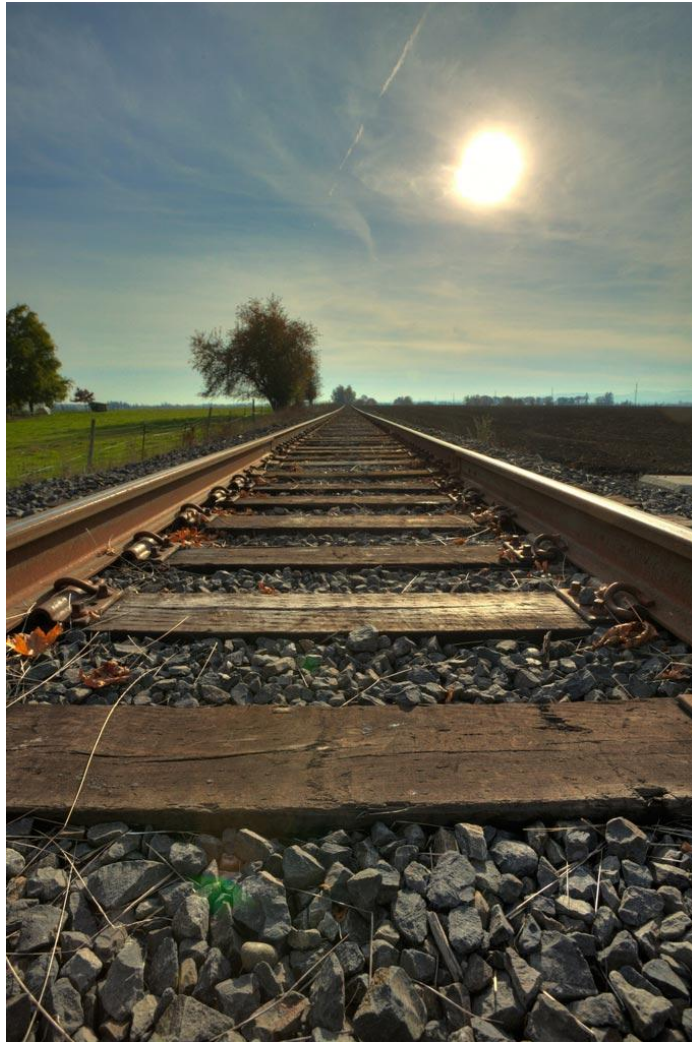


Photo by [David Lenker](#)

Hopefully, you agreed that the second photo portrayed a stronger sense of depth than the first one. Although this photo is a two-dimensional space, the simple use of converging lines on the railroad tracks adds depth and perspective to this photo. Because it was composed this way, as a viewer you feel as if you are part of the scene and could walk right in to it!

Just remember, if you want to convey a strong sense of depth within a scene, try to frame your shot so that it has some sort of converging lines within the composition. Converging lines are everywhere. Examples include: roadways, railroad tracks, power lines, hallways, sidewalks, steps, railings, city streets with buildings, fence lines, etc.

On the other hand, if you want to diminish the sense of depth within a scene, eliminate any form of converging lines within the composition. Without this type of reference point for how deep a scene is, your photo will instead appear flat. Depending on the situation, this may be just the type of composition you are looking for!

### **Overlapping Perspective Creates Depth**

Another way you can enhance depth within a photo is by using overlapping perspective. Instinctively, we perceive an object in our three-dimensional world that overlaps another object as being closer to us. Knowing this will allow you to maximize or minimize the perceived depth within a photo.

If you want to enhance the perceived depth within a photo, frame your composition so that an object in the foreground overlaps an object in the background. This simple trick will help replicate a three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional photo because we will perceive the object in the foreground as being closer to us.

Notice how the photo below contains depth because it uses overlapping perspective. Each person's head overlaps someone else's, which we perceive as being closer to us. Also notice how converging lines were used to enhance the sense of depth (the implicit lines formed by the buildings diminishing into the background.)



Photo by [Henry Burrows](#)

Another example of using overlapping perspective is below. The woman overlaps the bridge, therefore we perceive the woman as being closer to us than the bridge and rock.



Photo by [Kai Schreiber](#)

On the other hand, if you want to diminish the sense of depth in the shot, just remove all overlapping objects within the frame. This will remove any point of reference for depth within the shot, making it look flat.

Take the photo below for example. Without any overlapping objects we can't tell how far away the deer is to us, nor the background to the deer.



Photo by [Tambako the Jaguar](#)

### **Adding Foreground Objects Increases Depth**

A final way you can increase the depth within a photo is by adding foreground objects within the frame that shows relation and size. In a three-dimensional world, we perceive objects in the foreground as being bigger than objects in the background, which enhances the impression of depth. Unlike what you learned in the previous tips, these objects do not always have to overlap each other.

The best way to understand this concept is through an example.

Take a look at the photo below. Notice how flat it appears because there are no foreground elements within the frame.



Photo by [Universal Pops](#)

Now, look at this other version of the same photo below.



Photo by [Universal Pops](#)

Notice how the second composition contains a deeper sense of depth because it includes the fence post on the bottom of the frame. It's also considered a single converging line since it gets smaller as it moves away from the camera.

Just by including the foreground element of the fence the photographer was instantly able to turn a flat looking photo into something that looks three-dimensional. Also, notice how fence looks bigger, because it's closer to us, and the house looks smaller, because it's farther away. Adding this foreground element helps add a sense proportion, depth and perspective with in this photograph.

Just remember, if you want to increase the sense of depth within a composition, try to add some type of foreground element to show relation and size to the objects within the

scene. On the other hand, if you want to reduce the sense of depth in a photo you can frame it so that only objects appear in the foreground or background, but not both. This would eliminate any reference point of depth in the photo and make it appear flat.

### **Regardless of the Technique You Use, Lens Choice is Important!**

Up until this point, we've taught you three methods in which you can use to enhance or diminish the sense of depth and perspective within a photo. However, there's another aspect you must consider when using any of these techniques.

Regardless of the technique you use, lens choice is always important!

You see, the focal length on a lens has an inherent trait of either increasing or decreasing the depth within a photo. Wide angle lenses (ex. 12-28mm) create a large sense of depth within the frame, while telephoto lenses (ex. 200-300mm) create a shallow sense of depth within the frame.

If you want to increase the sense of depth within your photo, try to use a wide angle lens or short focal length as much as you can. This will enhance the perceived distance between elements in a photo which results in a deep perspective. For example, if you are using the converging lines technique, the lines will become elongated and more dramatic using a wide angle lens.

If you want to decrease the sense of depth within your photo, try to use a telephoto lens or long focal length. This will compresses the distance between objects and reduce the sense of depth and perspective in the shot. Using the converging lines technique, this lens will compress the perceived distance between the converging lines and the background making the photo appear more flat.

### **A Final Reminder**

It's up to you as the photographer to determine if you want to create deep or shallow depth and perspective in your photography. Both are correct and can produce equally amazing photos. The choice is yours.

A good rule of thumb to follow as you practice the techniques outlined in this chapter is to try both types of perspectives shooting on location. Then, when you get back home you can choose which shot you think looks best. This type of practice is invaluable and

will teach you how to “see” which type of perspective will be best for future situations before you even set up your composition!



Photo by [Lessfeet](#)

## Composing Better Backgrounds

When many photographers look through their camera's viewfinder they visually filter everything out but the primary subject. At first this may sound like a good idea, but what often results are photos with unwanted background elements that ruin the shot and frustrate the photographer.

In this chapter, we're going to teach you several tricks that you can use to compose better backgrounds and always be happy with the end result.

When composing photos it's equally important to pay attention to the background as you do to the main subject. By thinking about the whole frame before you snap a shot you'll end up composing a better background and capturing more photos that you're happy with.

To help you learn what to look for we've outlined a few tips on how to compose better backgrounds in photography.

### **Eliminate Distractions**

As you look through the viewfinder take note of everything you see around your subject. This will help you find distracting elements that otherwise would have been ignored. If you see any shapes or objects in the background that intersect oddly with your subject, recompose your frame to avoid them. Often, it only takes a minor adjustment of shifting your camera's position by tilting up or down, panning left or right, or zooming in closer. Good backgrounds are ones that are clean and free of contrasting elements.

Take a look at the photo below. Do you notice how distracting the clothes hangers are in the background? It competes with the subject. However, it's something that can easily be fixed.



Photo by [mharvey.mc](https://mharvey.mc)

Here is an alternate version of the same photo. All that's different is that we zoomed in tighter on the subject to eliminate the distraction. Notice how your attention is not as drawn to the background in this version?



Photo by [mharvey.me](https://www.mharvey.me)

When you're composing your shots, always look for distracting elements in the background before snapping the photo. Usually, only a simple adjustment is needed to make what could otherwise be a bad photo, look good.

### **Use Shallow Depth of Field**

Sometimes you may find that you can't eliminate all of the distracting elements in the background of your photographs. No matter how you reposition your camera these

elements still show up. The best way to fix this problem is to blur the background by using a larger aperture and shallow depth of field.

A large aperture (smaller f-stop number) creates shallow depth of field. By setting focus on your subject, the background will fall out of focus and remove the distractions, while at the same time bring full attention to your subject.

Below is a prime example of this technique. In the original scene the background had a lot of distracting elements. Even zooming in tight on the subject did not eliminate them. In order to fix it, a larger aperture setting was used to blur the background and bring all the focus onto the subject.



Photo by [Lessfeet](#)

As we mentioned in the previous chapter on out of focus foreground framing, we recommend that you check out the companion book to this series, [Mastering Aperture in Digital Photography](#), if you want to learn more about the many ways aperture affects a photograph and how to learn to always choose the perfect f-stop number for your image.

### **Include More of the Background**

Instead of trying to eliminate distracting elements in the background by repositioning or using a shallow depth of field, try to include more of it. This can often lead to a better looking photo and is a great trick to use when you are photographing someone in a visually distracting place.

Including more of the background can also help give the viewer a sense of location for the photo and communicate a better story.

Instead of fighting with the background for this engagement photo below, the photographer chose to use the background to compliment the composition. A sense of location helps bring more life to this photo. Something that a closer composed shot or larger aperture choice would not.



Photo by [sen1011](#)



Photo by [Monik Markus](#)

## How Less Can Be More in Photography

You may have heard the expression “Less is more” before. It’s a term often used in various situations and can also apply to the world of photography composition. Sometimes the most appealing compositions are ones where the subject matter is very simplistic. Not much is really going on within the frame, yet it is very intriguing to look at. Often, we try to fill the frame with as much stuff as we can and think it makes for a better photograph. In this chapter, you’ll learn that this is not always the case and how less can really be more in photography.

A problem many photographers have is that they like to cram as much into the frame as they possibly can because it just seems to be the natural thing to do. Why show only a couple of people or objects in your image when you can show half a dozen?

In some instances this is the right thing to do in a composition. For example, a once-in-a-lifetime trip with several friends or family members warrants everybody's face in the shot. However, in many cases a photo with less in it will actually be more powerful and say a lot more to the viewer. If there are too many elements in the shot the viewer can be easily distracted.

### **Know When to Implement it**

The key to being successful with this train of thought of how less can be more in photography is to know exactly when to implement it. The only true way you can really do this is by gaining experience and thinking about what you want the shot to represent and say before touching the shutter button.

For example, take a look at the photo below. Notice how little subject matter is in the frame (only a fence and a vine), but how it still makes a big impact.



Photo by [Sandeep Somasekharan](http://flickr.com/photos/sandyde)

Imagine how cluttered the photo of the vine growing on the fence would be if the background was in focus and you could see all of the distracting background elements. Also, think about how bad it would have been if a lot more of the fence was shown. It would have taken attention away from the main subject, the vine.

Below is another example of using this technique. This photo could have been shot in a multitude of ways. In fact, many photographers would have photographed it with other elements in the background, such as a fork, plate and napkin to fill out the scene (which could be perfectly fine). However, this photo speaks more to viewer because all distractions have been removed. We are forced to pay close attention to the artistic detail on the side of the cup. The photographer did an excellent job of following the less is more philosophy.



Photo by [Monik Markus](#)

### **Think Before You Shoot**

Before you ever press the shutter button on your camera you should always have something specific in mind to focus the viewer's attention on within a photograph. To do

this, just study the scene and decide what it is you want to portray within your photo. After studying the scene you should then decide if it would be better if something was left out of it.

Perhaps if something or somebody was omitted, the photo would draw the viewers' eyes on what you intended them to focus on. This creates better photography composition.

In some cases you just won't have an option when it comes to subtracting from the scene. It is what it is and you either take the shot or pass on it. But in many other cases you may be able to place subjects and objects into positions that are more effective. You will also have the opportunity to move yourself, which in turn changes the camera angle and position. This allows you to move things or shadows out of the way, especially if they're cluttering up the shot.

Below are is a good example of how less can be more in photography. Notice how in the photo the photographer omitted the person from the knee up.



Photos by [mAyumlx](#)

When you look at this photo you really don't need to see any more of the person. This photo makes more of an impact because our imagination fills in the blanks. We wonder what this person may look like, how old he may be and what he is doing sitting there. The more you can raise questions in your viewer's mind, the more intrigued he or she will be with your photo.

Also notice that this image utilized another technique we outlined in this book. Can you guess which one it is? Here's a hint: it has to do with lines.

## **Capture the Heart of the Scene**

By keeping certain photographs simple and just getting right to the heart of the scene and the story you're trying to tell you'll be able to create a more interesting image. It's a good idea to concentrate on things such shape, expression, form and gesture. The viewers will be able to see the obvious and can then let their imaginations take over to fill in the deliberate empty spaces.

Approaching a scene in this manner will make your photos more mysterious and open to interpretation, much like a song. Don't fall into the trap that many other photographers do by including too many elements in the shot that distract the viewer.

In the end, you'll discover that less really is more in photography.

## Additional Tips and Tricks

Hopefully, we've been able to help you understand that composing a good photograph is not as hard as it may seem. After reading this book you should now have a number of tricks you can pull from in order to compose better shots.

However, the learning should not stop here!

The lessons taught within this book are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to learning photography. There are always new tips and tricks you can learn to help master your craft as a photographer.

As an accompaniment to this book, we have put together a website that will help you continue on your journey of becoming a better photographer. We invite you to visit it at [FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com](http://FreeDigitalPhotographyTutorials.com). You will find a wealth of other tips, tricks and tutorials on photography that are updated every week for free!

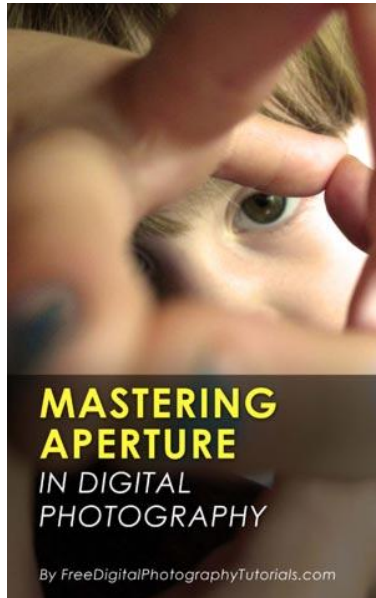
If you have any questions about the information provided within this book or on our website, please contact us at [info@freedigitalphotographytutorials.com](mailto:info@freedigitalphotographytutorials.com).

## One Last Thing...

If you found this book helpful in any way please consider posting a review in the amazon store. Books like these rely on reader reviews to get noticed by the rest of the community.

Also, if you have any friends or know of other photographers that could benefit from the information in this book, please recommend it to them.

## Other Books on Photography



### **Mastering Aperture in Digital Photography**

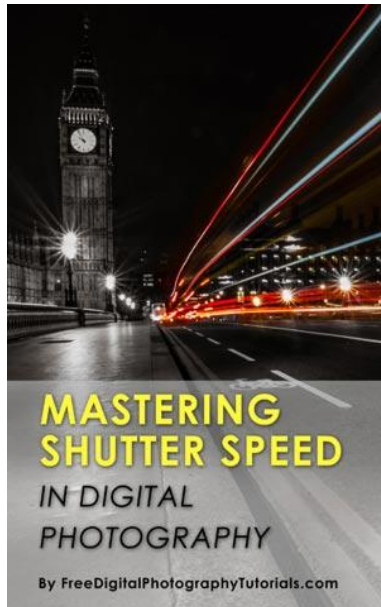
[Available here on Amazon.com](#)

One of the major problems photographers face is not knowing how to choose the right camera aperture for their photos. It's often that a photographer will want to capture a scene, such as a landscape, that's clearly focused throughout the frame. However, what usually happens is that only the trees in the foreground are in focus and the mountains in the background are out of focus or vice versa. The photo has too shallow depth of field as opposed to a deep depth of field. What went wrong? We'll teach you in this book.

Other times, a photographer tries to capture that classic "portrait look" with the subject in perfect focus while the background is out of focus and blurred. What tends to happen here is that everything turns out to be in focus. How can this be fixed? You'll learn what to do in this book.

Our intention with this book is to take the mystery out of how to use the aperture setting on your camera. Throughout these pages we'll teach you digital photography tips and tricks on how to master the aperture setting so that you end up with the types of shots

you intended. By the end, you'll know exactly how to minimize or maximize the depth of field within the frame.



## **Mastering Shutter Speed in Digital Photography**

[Available here on Amazon.com](#)

One of the biggest challenges photographers face is trying to capture action and motion. Moving subjects are troublesome for photographers because they usually result in an image that is too blurry. Other times, the photographer wants to emphasize the motion blur within the frame but ends up with a photo that has frozen the object in time.

The trick to fixing these types of problems is by manipulating shutter speed.

Our intention with this book is to take the mystery out of how to use the shutter speed setting on your camera. In these pages we'll teach you how to master the shutter speed setting and how to manipulate it so that you end up with the types of shots you intended. By the end, you'll know exactly how to freeze the action within a frame or allow it to blur for creative effect using fast shutter speed and slow shutter speed settings.



## **Mastering Exposure in Digital Photography**

[Available here on Amazon.com](#)

One of the major problems photographers face is not knowing how to properly expose a photo.

Often, a photographer will go out into the field, snap a few photos and be disappointed with the results. Sometimes the photos turn out darker than intended, while others turn out too bright. It seems to be just pure luck that any photos ever come out with the correct exposure, but even if they do some can still use a little tweaking to be “perfect.”

The trick to fixing these problems is by understanding exposure.

What many new photographers don’t know is that there are certain things that you must think about in regards to the exposure of a photograph before you ever take it. In fact, several concepts and camera settings must be mastered before you can even think about creating a properly exposed image.

We’ll teach you these things in this book.

